

# Welcome Rivelle!

**Post by “Rivelle” of April 2, 2019 at 10:12 PM**

Thank you for your summation of Epicurus’s system. Whilst I take your point regarding the impossibility of understanding the parts unless one has equally grasped the whole into which they are to be placed – “Don’t fear god; Don’t worry about death” is firstly to be grounded in atomistic physics from which proceeds the consequent prescriptive psychology of *modus vivendi* – I thought it might of interest to break this rule somewhat in order to attempt to explain how the subjective state of being which is *ataraxia* is helpful to those like me who have depression.

Keats’s oeuvre contains an insightful line which pertains to our purposes here: “half in love with easeful death”. Keats also wrote an Ode to Melancholy.

(Amongst the artistic representations of Melancholy, arguably the greatest is Albrecht Durer’s “Melencolia I”. See Giorgio Agamben on Durer.)

Otherwise put, “half in love with easeful death” may serve as a description of, for example, suicidal ideation; listlessness, apathy and anhedonia; unhappiness which results from the neurological conditions (depressive illness) which may result in various forms of self-negation.

*Ataraxia* from Pyrrho to the Stoics was a warrior’s virtue. The maintenance of clear-headed equanimity and fearlessness in the heat of battle. The place of *ataraxia* in Epicurus’s system is less straightforward. Glory-seeking activities such as warfare and conquest will not bring happiness and are manifestations of an underlying denial of mortality.

But equally, the Epicurean cheerfulness which will result when we do not worry about death (in the terms set out above, when we are not depressed, not “half in love with easeful death”) depends in part upon the stillness of mind or the equanimity which is *ataraxia*.

Possibly the influences of Indian thought on the Hellenistic philosophers may be seen here. Leaving to one side philosophical-historical questions for the moment, mindfulness meditation exercises are often recommended as one way to manage and treat depressive illness. The end-goal of meditation exercises varies with those who practise them. Most commonly, they are useful to people to help cope with the stresses of everyday life. For monks they are part of an asceticism which pierces the veils of *samsaric* illusion in accordance with their doctrine of *anattā* (Pali) or *anātman* (Sanskrit). For sufferers of depression, meditation can help them maintain their selfhood and quell the inner demons of self-negation. *Ataraxia* may be one name we could give to this healthful condition. Depressive anhedonia is an anti-thetical force which blocks Epicurean pleasures

